

## **Review of *Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, ed. by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel**

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*Frameworks: Contemporary Criticism on Janet Frame*, edited by Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2009, xxvii + 227 pp., €50.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 9 0420 2676 6

According to its editors, Jan Cronin and Simone Drichel, one of the aims of this collection of essays is to appraise the current state of Frame scholarship: “where are Frame studies today? What are its major concerns?” (ix). In an attempt to avoid reproducing the potentially problematic features of some earlier strands of criticism – which either randomly applied theories to the work of the New Zealand writer or, adopting biographical or social-realist approaches, promoted an image of Frame as a “marginalized visionary” (xi) – Cronin and Drichel explicitly express the wish for their volume to “cultivate a high degree of methodological self-reflexivity” (x). The result is an accomplished book with a remarkably clear sense of direction but which, perhaps inevitably given the collection’s metacritical focus, occasionally teaches us more about contemporary Frame studies (or, more accurately, about the way in which the editors “consciously [re-determine]” them [xi]) than it does about Frame’s work itself.

The collection is divided into three parts, entitled “Meta-Critical Frame(s)”, “Metaphysical Frame(s)” and “Beyond the Frame(s) of Representation”. A stimulating dialogue is established from the first section onwards, in which Jan Cronin’s and Jennifer Lawn’s essays, which respectively examine the internal dynamics of Frame’s texts and her engagement with Freudian theory, reach opposite conclusions on the advisability of self-contained readings of the author’s work. In the second section, all articles share an overarching concern with Frame’s metaphysical views, which are confronted with those of philosophers such as Heidegger (Lydia Wevers) and Sartre (Anna Smaill), read through the trope of migration (Isabel Michell), and explored in their poetic manifestations (Valérie Baisnée). Taking an ethical turn, the final part of the volume proposes an essay on the role

played by violence in Frame's aesthetic (Marc Delrez), and concludes with two pieces that aim to show how the writer's work reflects and further enlightens theories by Baudrillard (Chris Prentice) and Levinas (Simone Drichel).

The nine long essays contained in the collection are, on the whole, well crafted and well researched. Even though some do not entirely live up to their promising introductions and a few others tend to be overly theoretical, all articles ultimately have something valuable to contribute to Frame scholarship. Perhaps slightly less convincing – despite the interesting echoes between the different contributions – is the sum of these parts. Indeed, a substantial proportion of the volume obsessively addresses Frame's metaphysics – admittedly an important aspect of her work, and one whose analysis may provide illuminating insights into her texts (Smaill's existentialist reading is a case in point), but surely not the only facet of Frame's extraordinary oeuvre still in need of critical attention (features relating to form, for example, come to mind).

Despite this reservation, it must be mentioned that all the essays contained in *Frameworks* are thought provoking in the literal sense of the word – a fact rare enough to be underscored – in that they elicit responses from the reader, make him or her reflect on the validity of the sophisticated arguments deployed, and often open up avenues for further research. This, I believe, augurs well for the future of Frame studies.